

THE MÉTRAUX-BARTHEL CORRESPONDENCE (1956-61) AND THE MÉTRAUX FIELD-NOTES OF EASTER ISLAND

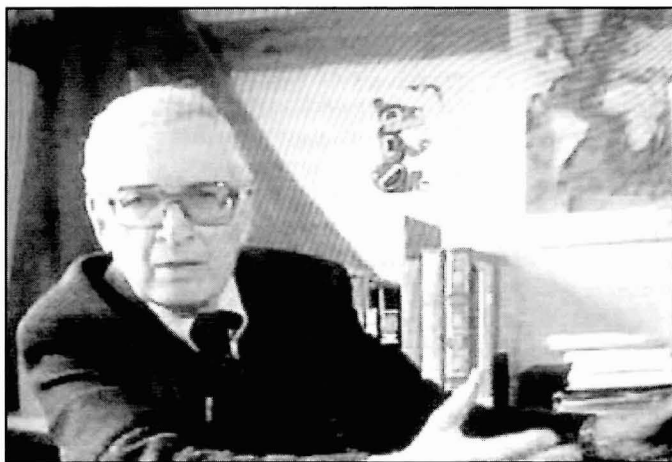
[Part One]¹

Steven Roger Fischer

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Fifty years ago, the German ethnologist Thomas S. Barthel [pronounced BART-el] reached for his personally bound volume of *Ethnology of Easter Island* (Honolulu, 1940), opened it to page 4, and read Alfred Métraux's words that, by then, had become so familiar:

All the legends and traditions that I collected were recorded in the Easter Island language. For reasons of economy, only a few examples of native text are published here. The original manuscripts are filed in the Library of Bishop Museum where they are available to students of Polynesian linguistics. These texts are accompanied by vocabularies and by additional chants.



Thomas Barthel

In the left-hand margin, in pencil, Barthel added in a fine, minuscule: "ab Nov. 58 bei mir" ("as of Nov. [19]58 with me").

How did the thirty-five year-old German scholar, who in 1958 had not yet secured a university position, come to acquire priceless field-notes from one of the twentieth century's epochal voyages to Easter Island — the Franco-Belgian Expedition of 1934-35, led by Swiss ethnologist Alfred Métraux? The answer is both fascinating and informative, involving five years of increasing amity and mutual respect, as well as of an ever greater appreciation of the challenge and frustration that is Easter Island.

It all began in 1955 when Barthel, then a recent PhD in American Studies who was loosely attached to the Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum of Ethnology) at Hamburg, was still working on his greatest contribution to Easter Island scholarship — *Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift* ("Rudiments Toward the Decipherment of the Easter Island Script"). He wrote to Margaret Titcomb, Librarian of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, enquiring about

"string figures and chants of Easter Island collected by Dr. Alfred Métraux".

On May 27, 1955, Titcomb replied by letter that Métraux's materials "were not deposited at Bishop Museum. Dr. Métraux was not on a Bishop Museum expedition at the time he stopped in Easter Island, and therefore the notes he took belonged to him, not to us". She recommended that Barthel turn directly to Métraux, whom Barthel could find working as an ethnologist with UNESCO in Paris.

Nearly a full year passed. On May 11, 1956, Métraux was the one who approached Barthel, writing in English under the UNESCO letterhead at 19 Avenue Kléber, Paris XVI:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

I have just received a letter from Dr. Heine Geldern [Austria's foremost ethnologist, Robert Freiherr von Heine-Geldern, in Vienna] in which he informs me that you have made great headways in the deciphering of the Easter Island script. As you perhaps know, I have been concerned with this question and have always doubted that the signs corresponded to the actual writing, either syllabic or alphabetic.

I am, of course, extremely curious to know your conclusions. I am publishing now a new version of my popular book on Easter Island² and if you have discovered that the tablets contain real writing, I would like to qualify my hypothesis and, in a truly scientific spirit, refer the reader to your discovery. Dr. Heine Geldern says that you have found that the script is a "catch-word" script. I don't know what he means by that but I am inclined [sic] to think that this expression must be interpreted as a sign to help the memory of the chanter, a group of words or several verses of a chant, in the same way as the Cuna pictogram.

I should be pleased to be of assistance to you, should you need any material on Easter Island. I wish to congratulate you for the immense effort which this study has entailed and for the promising results you have achieved.

*Yours sincerely,
A. Métraux*



Alfred Métraux

Barthel answered immediately, writing also in English, on May 20, 1956, to Métraux's Avenue Kléber address in Paris from his then quarters at Lüne Monastery in Lüneburg, Germany:

Dear Dr Métraux,

I was pleased reading your letter dated May 11th, as much of my work done on the deciphering of Easter Island script is based on your excellent ethnographic monograph [Ethnology of Easter Island]. After three years intensive research I finished my investigations in this spring by completing a MS. of about 500 pages under the title "Grundlagen zur Entzifferung der Osterinselschrift" (foundations towards the decipherment of Easter Island script), which presumably will be published in 1957.

Of course I am glad to give you any information needed for the new version of your popular book, especially as a German translation — so I have heard — is about to appear.

[Here, Barthel details his main findings concerning the rongorongo script, then concludes on page 3:]

To summarize: Easter Island writing can be defined as a conventional system of recording communicable traditions with a limited fund of graphic elements which can be remarkably increased by means of further composition following strict rules. Easter Island script stands above the level of mere pictograph and had a complex quality of both fixed and ambiguous ideograms, different grades of symbolization and word-signs, which can be used phonetically for expressing names, as well as in rebus-fashion for homonyms. The principles of text-condensation and partial phonetic indication make an understanding difficult, but by no means wholly impossible.

I agree with you that the signs do not correspond with alphabetic and/or syllabic writing. Nevertheless, it is a script sui generis, which might be compared with (but not historically derived from!) graphic system [sic] in Mesoamerica and the very first beginnings of writing in ancient Sumer, Egypt and China.

The textual composition of the tablets, their content, and especially the problem of their historical provenance might be discussed in another letter.

As you were so kind as to offer assistance in these studies, I would be very interested to learn more about the "kaikai"-texts collected by you back in 1934. Although you announced their pending publication in 1940, I have nowhere found them; the Bishop Museum [in Honolulu] thought it advisable that I should contact you re this question. There is a slight chance that small fragments of ancient and forgotten tablet-songs survive, although garbled, in those texts.... It would be of considerable interest to analyze your "kaikai"-songs.

What do you think about Heyerdahl's claim [of] having found a Tiahuanaco stratum at Orongo? Although being an americanist myself and not a Polynesian specialist, so far I see no reason to accept any of his migration theories.

Are you participating in the Copenhagen [sic] congress in August [= International Americanist Congress, August 1956]?

*Yours sincerely,
Thomas Barthel*

Métraux's reply was just as prompt, writing again in English on May 28, 1956, once more under the UNESCO letterhead:

Dear Mr. Barthel,

I have just received your letter of May 20 which is by far one of the most interesting I have read for years on the subject of Easter Island. I would even say that the facts which you mention are the only important event in connexion [sic] with Easter Island research which have taken place in the last twenty years.

As you have probably noticed, I am usually enclined [sic] to scepticism, but your letter has convinced me that you are on the right path and that the system, as you describe it, fits in very well with facts on hand and accounts for many of the difficulties which we could surmise [sic] but not understand.

I wish to congratulate you most heartily for this splendid piece of work. I am convinced that it will have the best reception in the scientific world and that your name will be for ever attached to one of the most difficult riddles of the Pacific.

With your permission, I would like to quote in my book the paragraph in which you summarize your views. I shall tone down or even delete a few sentences in my own text, which now appear to me as a wrong interpretation of the system. There is only one thing that worries me: How is it that most tablets are entirely covered with symbols, sometimes even on their edges, and that the same thing occurs with the staff which is in Santiago?

The texts of the many string figures which I collected in Easter Island have remained in my notebooks which have been deposited at the Bishop Museum. Please write to the Librarian, Miss Margaret Titcomb; if my manuscripts are still in their archives, I would like Miss Titcomb to send them to you or they could be sent to me and I would make a typewritten copy of them and mail them to you. I do understand that these texts may be very valuable, but I did not find an opportunity of publishing them. I must admit that the translation which I obtained from the natives were most confused and I could not make head or tail of most of them.

In the new edition of my popular book on Easter Island I criticize very sharply Heyerdahl's theory on parallels between Easter Island and Peru. As you know, I am also an americanist and I have just returned from Tiahuanaco. I can assure you that nothing is more different than the statues of Tiahuanaco and those of Easter Island. I would be willing to believe in a Tiahuanacan layer of Easter Island the day genuine Tiahuanacan pots show up.

Thanking you very much for the most valuable information which you so kindly sent me, I remain,

*Yours sincerely,
Alfred Métraux*

Obviously pleased, Barthel again lost no time in replying to this. On June 5, 1956, he wrote in English to Métraux:

Dear Dr Métraux,

Thank you very much for your kind comments on my results (especially in view of your sound scepticism in such matters). Of course you may quote the information in my last letter at will.

Although I can't give you a definite explanation for the fact that the scribes were eager to cover the whole surface with symbols (to call it "horror vacui" would merely put a psychological label [sic] on an unsolved problem), I wish to call your attention to the following peculiarities....

[Here Barthel details, in two paragraphs, various oddities of rongorongo.]

Concerning your texts for string-figures I may quote a letter from Miss Titcomb, dated May 27, 1955.... [See above.] It would be very kind of you if you, being the author of the missing notes, would contact the Bishop Museum and forward the request. Please take my best thanks for your assistance in advance.

In Copenhagen [sic] I will report on the partial decipherment of Easter Island tablets and criticize Heyerdahl's immigration theory from this angle too.

[A page follows detailing Barthel's "readings" and general impressions of the rongorongo script, as was later published in his *Grundlagen*. He then concludes:]

Of course, all these conclusions can only be judged in the light of the whole evidence collected in my Ms. — so I would suggest you may use these ethnohistorical facts for the time being as "inside-information", just to delineate the many fresh problems.

If there are any further specific questions, I am always pleased to answer them as good as I can.

I remain yours sincerely

Thomas Barthel

Métraux in the meanwhile had gone on vacation. On his return to Paris, he did not hesitate to reply, writing again in English under the UNESCO letterhead dated July 23, 1956:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

On my return from vacation, I found your most interesting letter of 5 June. The more you write about the results of your painstaking research, the more exciting your discovery appears to me.

I was very much struck by the fact that your conclusions regarding the origin of the script coincides [sic] so much with that which I reached through other fields. As you remember, I am also convinced of a very close link between Easter Island culture and that of the Marquesas, Mangareva and the Maori of New Zealand. I quite agree with you as to the relationship between Makemake and Tiki. The themes which you discovered in the tablets seem to be exactly those which the rongorongo men would have been interested in. All this means that in the results of your work, everything seems to click nicely with Easter Island culture as far as we know it.

I am sending you (under separate cover) a very popular article which was published in the "Courier" of Unesco and

in which you will find a reference to your discovery. Please remember that this is something destined to a public which is in no way scientific or even very learned. In the English version of my Easter Island book, I have added a post-script mentioning your work and stating that although it probably modified whatever I had said previously, my theories on the script would still perhaps hold an historical interest.

I shall write today to Miss Titcomb and tell her that I am perfectly sure of having left in the Archives of the Bishop Museum all my notebooks. In fact, I still remember very well my hesitation and my final decision to leave them. I could even describe to her the nature of the documents. I am sure that if she goes to her Archives, she will find them.

Unfortunately, I shall not go to Copenhagen and I am afraid I shall miss the important communication which you will make at the Congress. May I ask you to be kind enough to send me a copy of your text, if possible? Are you going to the Philadelphia Congress of Anthropologists?

Yours sincerely,

A. Métraux

It was not until August 19, 1956, that Barthel replied from Lüne Monastery, having in the meanwhile attended the Copenhagen Congress:

Dear Dr. Métraux,

The exciting days in Copenhagen have passed, and it really was a pity that you could not participate in the discussions — especially as Thor Heyerdahl was present, being just returned from his expedition [to Easter Island, 1955-56]. Enclosed you find a copy of my paper (a second one was concerned with the actual [= present] state in the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs criticizing the attempts of my Russian colleague Dr. Knorosov)³ — I trust you will find no difficulty in dealing with the German text. [French Swiss; Métraux read and fluently spoke German.]

Heyerdahl told me that three archaeological stages should be differentiated on Easter Island, the last one belonging to a group of invaders who destroyed the moai. According to carbon 14-dating the moai are supposed to be considerably older than the last period which might correspond more or less with the 14th century. I have no intention to judge archaeological facts with non-archaeological material. However, it is interesting to note that an assumed immigration of Hotu Matu'a and his tablet-possessing people in the 14th century could be linked with the last archaeological period of Heyerdahl. Furthermore this would explain the almost complete lack of data concerning moai in the tablet-texts. One passage only speaks of warriors overturning the moai (without details when and why it happened).

I am going to Chile next year and hope to spend some time on Easter Island too, doing a bit of ethnographic research.⁴ This brings me to a point which might be profitably discussed with you: Do you think there is any chance to get financial support from American institutions to do research work for a certain period at Bishop Museum, Honolulu? Being

in South America in 1957, it seems tempting to continue my investigations in Hawaii in 1958. Perhaps it would be of considerable help to contact people interested in this research project ("further decipherments of Easter Island script") with your kind assistance?

The problem of publication [of the *Grundlagen*] has not yet been settled. However, we do hope to publish the results in Hamburg next year. In case you have left Paris, this letter should be forwarded to your new address.

Yours sincerely
Thomas Barthel

Meanwhile, on August 16, 1956, Titcomb, already having been prompted by Alfred Métraux, had written to Barthel for a second time at the Museum für Völkerkunde, Hamburg, which letter was then forwarded to Barthel at Lüne Monastery in Lüneburg:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

After receiving just now a letter from Dr. Alfred Métraux, asking me to look again for his notebooks, I have done so, and find ten of them. Field notebooks are kept in a separate spot — there I looked last year and there they were not. I am sorry to have misled and denied you!

Dr. Métraux asks me to send them to you. They are ten in number — tales and chants, etc. They go to you in two packages and will be mailed to you today. I shall ask him to let you know what to do with the notebooks when you have finished using them.

Sincerely yours,
Margaret Titcomb
Librarian

Only six days later, on August 22, 1956, writing once again in English under the UNESCO letterhead (No. SS/636.519) from Paris, Métraux informed Barthel of his message to Titcomb:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

I wish to thank you very much for your letter of 19 August together with the text of your communication to the International Americanist Congress in Copenhagen, which I found exceedingly interesting and clear. I am pleased to see that in many instances you have reached the same conclusions as I. I am most dubious as to Heyerdahl's data and if he has used the same methods on Easter Island as he has for his book [*American Indians in the Pacific*, London, 1952], it is difficult to take him seriously: of course, I don't know whether the fact that he has found new statues is true, and I am impatiently waiting for [= French for "looking forward to"] his first scientific reports.

I have a very good piece of news for you: all my notebooks containing the text of the string figures have been found and mailed to you. I am afraid it will be somewhat difficult to find your way through notes taken in pencil, while sitting on a rock near the shore, but I do hope that the text of the "kaikai" is sufficiently clear and can be used.

I shall naturally be delighted to support your application for a fellowship which might enable you to go to Honolulu. So far, I can see two possibilities:

1. That you get — like I did — a Bishop Museum fellowship for one year.
2. That you get a fellowship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

I am glad you will be able to go to Chile next year and I do hope we shall meet there if our Institute of Social Sciences [at Concepción] takes shape.⁵ I am leaving for Philadelphia next Wednesday and wonder whether I shall see Heyerdahl at the Congress [of Anthropologists]. Anyway, I shall meet Prof. Heine-Geldern and you may be sure that we shall talk about your interesting interpretation of the tablets.

Yours sincerely,
A. Métraux
Department of Social Sciences

On October 16, 1956, Barthel wrote to Alexander Spoehr, Director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum at Honolulu, informing him of his "successful partial decipherment of Easter Island script" and enquiring whether there might be "any chance to applicate [sic] for a Bishop Museum fellowship to continue the decipherment of 'kohau-rongorongo' with the help of extensive comparative studies in the libraries of Honolulu? As I am going to Chile and Easter Island next year, the project could start at the earliest in the spring of 1958". As referees he cited Métraux and Heine-Geldern. "My actual [= present] position is with the university of Hamburg".

On the same day, Barthel wrote to Titcomb as well, Librarian at the Bishop Museum:

Dear Miss Titcomb :

Thank you very much for sending me Dr. Métraux' fieldnotes from Easter Island. All ten notebooks have arrived safely and when I have finished studying this material they shall be returned to Dr. Métraux' address in Paris. Unfortunately, I still miss the series of 28 string-figures which Dr. Métraux collected in 1934-35; are you really quite sure that no sketches (or original items??) with accompanying chants might be deposited somewhere in Bishop Museum?

One further request, please: Are there any copies available of the Museum Bulletin 160 [Métraux's *Ethnology of Easter Island - Honolulu, 1940*]? As I am going to Easter Island myself in the near future, I would be glad to take the "Ethnology of Easter Island" with me to check on the spot. So — if possible — I would like to order one copy; when forwarding to my Museum address (Museum fuer Voelkerkunde, Hamburg 13, Binderstr. 14), I believe shipping would do.

With best regards
Yours sincerely
Thomas Barthel

Already on October 22, 1956, Titcomb sent Barthel the following reply:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

With regret I have to say that you have all the manuscript notes by Alfred Métraux on Easter Is. There are no string figures here. I hope he himself has them. But doubtless you have asked him already. If you can do so undoubtedly you will procure notes on them when you go to Easter Island.

Dr. Métraux's work on Easter Island (our Bulletin 160) has been out of print for some time. Can he not lend you a copy? I should think he must have more than one. If not, I shall ask the Director, Dr. Alexander Spoehr, whether I may take the copy from the shelf here to lend to you. But that is precarious. Perhaps there is a copy at the Senckenbergische Naturforschende Gesellschaft, in Frankfurt. They should have a copy.

Sincerely yours,
Margaret Titcomb
Librarian

It is perhaps difficult for today's younger scholars to appreciate the impediments to international travel and to access to secondary research that prevailed before the age of mass tourism and photocopy machines (not to mention online archives). Barthel urgently needed an exemplar of Métraux's *Ethnology* to take with him to the island in 1957. However, he was never to obtain one from the Bishop Museum, which had published the work in 1940.

On December 10, 1956, Alfred Métraux was kind enough to query Barthel about the field notebooks; it appears Barthel had not yet informed him of their safe arrival at Hamburg (it is unknown how long the two packages were in transit). Indeed, Métraux graciously even offered to intercede with the French press on Barthel's behalf, writing yet again in English under the UNESCO letterhead (No. SS/664.126):

Dear Dr. Barthel,

It is a long time since I have heard from you. The Wenner Gren Foundation has written to me, asking my opinion of your application. I answered immediately and stressed the importance of your work and the necessity of having it published as soon as possible. I classified it in Category A which means in the most important anthropological project.

There is one matter, however, which worries me: Miss Titcomb wrote last August that she had found my notebooks containing the text of 28 string figures and that she had sent these to you. I was hoping that you would tell me whether you had received them or not. Please reassure me on this point because if this very important material is lost, we shall never again be able to find the text of the string figures. If it is too difficult for you to find, in my scattered notes, the relevant parts, I would be glad to go through them myself and copy the texts.

One of our publications, "Unesco Features", is interested in mentioning your discovery. I have shown the editor the text of your communication and he may publish an article on it. This would give your discovery a world-wide publicity. Would you agree to it?

I would be most grateful for a prompt reply as this last point is somewhat urgent.

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely,
A. Métraux
Department of Social Sciences

Only two days later, on December 12, 1956, Barthel typed the following reply to Métraux from Lüne Monastery:

Dear Dr Métraux,

I have to apologize for being so taciturn during the last months; certain personal troubles somewhat hampered all my communications. So first I wish to thank you very much — although unpardonable [sic] belated — for your fieldnotes. Actually, all ten notebooks arrived safely and permitted my starting some preliminary work. There certainly are a number of texts for string-figures scattered among your material, although indications for the formal aspects of the *kaikai* are lacking. All your valuable material is safe, and if you could do without the note-books for two more months I would be able to complete my excerpts.

Regarding the UNESCO FEATURES, of course I gladly agree with using my congress communication as base for that article. On the other hand, let us hope the problem of publishing my detailed Ms. will be solved with the aid of the Wenner-Gren Foundation in 1957....

I asked Dr Spoehr about the chance of getting a fellowship to continue my studies in Honolulu; unfortunately, at the present time, the Yale-Bishop Museum fellowships are awarded entirely in the field of biology, and not in ethnology. Well, anyway I hope to do some necessary work in Santiago. If my state of health permits it, I intend to start my Chile visit with some archaeological reconnaissance in the Atacama area. Did I tell you that the Soviets too have started work on Easter Island script? I just received the translation of a communication given at a Congress in Leningrad, held in May [1956], by Butinow & Knorosow (i.e. a team consisting of an oceanist and an epigrapher), with some general discussions and one interesting result, proving the existence of a short genealogy (6 generations?). Presumably this will be published in the *Sovietskaja Etnografija*.⁶ The knotty problem of determining names in the tablet texts still offers many difficulties.

I think that's all for the moment. Please take again my sincere thanks for the kind assistance you have been offering in the "struggle with the *kohau-rongorongo*"!

With best wishes
Very truly [sic] yours
Thomas Barthel

Almost immediately upon receipt of the foregoing letter, on December 17, 1956, Métraux answered again under UNESCO letterhead (No. SS/664.132) from his Avenue Kléber office in Paris, offering thoughtful words of advice to the German scholar twenty-two years his junior:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

Thank you very much for your most interesting letter of 12 December and for the proofs of your article. I am aware that it must be difficult to use the field-notes of another person, but I would like to mention that I collected the string-figures themselves and that it would have been easy in Honolulu to relate the chant to the figures; but this relationship does not matter very much. What is interesting is the chant.

Let me give you a note of warning: one must be extremely cautious about material collected on Easter Island in our days. Don't forget that the "natives" are highly sophisticated and have a keen notion of the commercial value of their information. I never published the tablets which I collected on the Island because, in my opinion, they were fakes — though extremely good fakes. Professor Vaysson Pradenne — one of the world's leading expert[s] in forgery, once told me that a tablet which I had shown him was one of the most skillful fakes he has ever had in hand.

As for Heyerdahl's discoveries, the information I could get from an archeologist sounded very different from the declarations printed in the newspapers.

Yours sincerely,

A. Métraux

Department of Social Sciences

A little over a fortnight later, on January 3, 1957, one day before his thirty-fourth birthday, Barthel replied from Lüne Monastery:

Dear Dr. Métraux,

Thanks for your last letter, dated December 17th. It was a surprise to learn that you did collect falsificated [sic] tablets during your stay in 1934/35. As a matter of fact, in a chapter of my book I have discussed all published fakes; so you will understand that I am rather eager to hear more about the specimens in your possession. As a symbol for cultural change even forgeries have their intrinsic value; furthermore, it is interesting to see how the work was done and which models were in use then. Sometimes the texts on falsificated [sic] tablets point to some problem. So, if possible, I would be very grateful to study photos of your fake-collection and the story of their production and sale....

With my best wishes for the New Year

I remain yours

Thomas Barthel

Again, Métraux lost no time in answering, for the first time corresponding sans the UNESCO Avenue Kléber letter-head. On January 9, 1957, he informed Barthel in English at Lüne Monastery:

Dear Dr. Barthel,

I have just received your letter and thank you very much for your courtesy in associating me with your work. I have read your Catalogue⁷ with great interest as you can well imagine, but also with some surprise because I don't quite

understand what these documents are. Are they new tablets found in caves or just manuscripts written on paper by the natives?

As far as I can see from your analysis, these manuscripts don't contain anything new or startling. They reproduce Tepano Jaussen's list. I remember very clearly that I brought myself a copy of "Jaussen" to the Island and asked [Juan] Tepano and other natives to translate the text and check the words. I think that there is a Chilian [sic] translation of it and someone might have brought it to the Island.

Your comparison with the Chilam-Balam seems a little farfetched. May I tell you a story which has a certain importance in the light of your discoveries: when we were on the Island, Mr. Lavachery and myself, we caused a great stir amongst the natives by offering 1,000 pesos (a lot of money at the time) to anyone who could tell us about the tablets. People had dreams about them; they came and told us of caves which were investigated without success.... One day, I entered unexpectedly with Lavachery the house of a man whose name was — if I remember right — Paoa, and we found on his table a stone tablet which he was engraving. It was a beautiful piece of work: he was using transfers from a book. The fake was a masterpiece. He was very annoyed with us at having caught [sic] him in the middle of his work but explained that he intended to sell it to Chilian [sic] sailors who would not see the difference with a genuine tablet. We encouraged him to go ahead and sell it to us — which he never did. The tablet may be now, as far as I know, in some museum....

I bought at a rather high price a flat black stone engraved with beautiful glyphs. I showed it to an expert in Paris with the hope that it was genuine but as I had surmised, it was also a fake — but a very good one. The next time I go to the Musée de l'Homme, I shall get its reference number and you can order a photograph of it if you wish.

During our stay on the Island we also showed around and discussed photographs of the tablets. [Juan] Tepano was not my only informant and I had a long discussion on the subject with Charles Teao. We also lent Mrs. Routledge's book and Thompson's [sic] Monograph to the natives so that they might copy artifacts. A man by the name of Araki was commissioned to produce all objects his ancestors had used and we helped him by giving him books and photographs of specimens.

In 1934, some theories put forth by McMillan Brown had already been adopted by the natives who recited them to us as legends and traditions "known from their ancestors"!

We spoke to the natives of early visitors to the Island, and in particular of Roeggewin [sic]. To my great amusement, I found in the stories collected by Father Englert some of the details we had given to the natives! They are now being used as a proof of the astounding memory of the Easter Islanders who remember trifles of their first contact with Europeans in 1722!

Moreover, during our stay, we were pestered by forgers who sold us stone and bone artifacts which were so well imitated that more than once we were taken in and paid large sums of money for objects which had been made only a few

days before. I never would have thought that the Easter Islanders were still capable of making stone hooks. It is only the quantity of them which was suddenly offered to us that opened our eyes.

In a trench we dug near an "ahu" we discovered beautiful bone objects. Later on they also proved to be fakes but I can tell you that before we knew, we were overjoyed for several days!

I am terribly sorry, Dr. Barthel, that God has given me a very critical mind. I know that this is a great handicap in science and sometimes prevents one from making useful discoveries, but I cannot easily believe that in 1956 the Easter Islanders have suddenly turned out to have a better knowledge of their past than they had in 1886, 1914 or even 1934.

Don't forget that they are very intelligent people who now go to school, who receive, every year, visitors who ask them the same questions; that many of them have been to Chile and visited museums and that Father Englert has lived amongst them for more than 12 years.... As a field anthropologist, I think I can tell what comes from a genuine culture and what is a secondary incorporation into a culture.

I wish you could go to a North American reservation and have the experience of Indians telling you about what they have read in anthropological books! It happened to me and to many....

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely
A. Métraux

NOTES

¹ The information in this article derives from original correspondence now deposited at the Institute of Polynesian Languages and Literatures, Auckland, New Zealand. Information concerning this collection can be obtained from Steven Roger Fischer, Director: P.O. Box 6965 Wellesley St., Auckland, New Zealand; rongosf@internet.co.nz.

² *Easter Island: A Stone-Age Civilization of the Pacific*, translated by Michael Bullock. London: Andre Deutsch, 1957.

³ At the Congress, Yuri Knorosov announced what only much later was acknowledged to be the key to the genuine decipherment of the Mayan script. It was an historic moment in international epigraphy.

⁴ This is the Chilean-German Expedition of 1957-58.

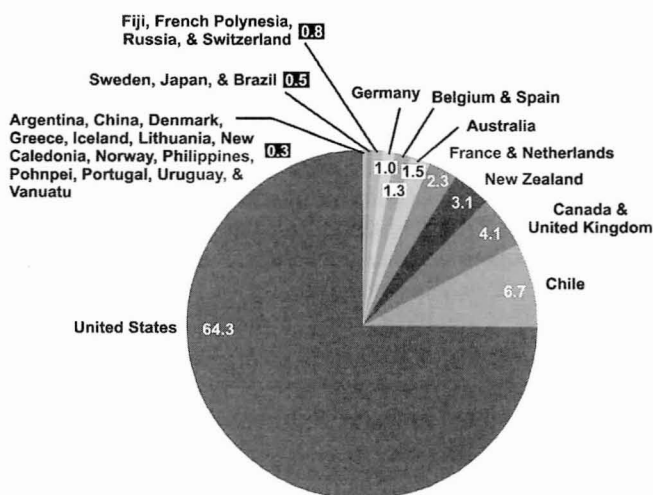
⁵ Métraux's plans to erect his own Institute of Social Sciences in Concepción, Chile, came to nought. In 1958, Barthel had been offered the position of Assistant Director at Métraux's proposed Institute, but had turned it down (personal communication, 1990).

⁶ It was published the Moscow *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 4:77-91 (1956).

⁷ This is the manuscript of Barthel's article "Native Documents from Easter Island", eventually published in 1965 in Volume Two of Heyerdahl and Ferdon's *Reports of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition*.

[Editor's Note: Part Two will appear in the next issue of *RNJ*.]

**EIF MEMBERSHIP
(% by country)**



**EIF MEMBERSHIP
(% by U.S. state)**

